

December 7, 2004

Souder is Right: Let's Prove that Marijuana is Safe

Dear Colleague:

Representative Souder recently circulated a Dear Colleague letter announcing the introduction of the "Safe and Effective Drug Act," a bill directing the National Institute for Drug Abuse to examine the available scientific data regarding the safety and effectiveness of marijuana and requiring the FDA to post this information and distribute it to those public health entities that advocate or recommend patients smoke marijuana.

I would urge all Members to cosponsor this legislation, **IF** it were truly designed to produce an honest evaluation of the scientific data available. I am, however, skeptical that this will be the case, given that the bill only refers to "smoked" marijuana and is proposing that the examination be carried out by the National Institute on Drug Abuse -- an agency which is actively blocking medical marijuana research (see below) while consistently highlighting and exaggerating the drug's negative consequences.

An honest evaluation of marijuana, if carried out, would be guaranteed to lead to the same conclusion reached by the DEA's chief administrative law judge, Francis L. Young, who wrote in 1988, after a two-year study:

"Marijuana, in its natural form, is one of the safest therapeutically active substances known...It would be unreasonable, arbitrary and capricious for DEA to continue to stand between those sufferers and the benefits of this substance."

An honest evaluation would also discover:

There has never been a documented case of overdose death from marijuana In contrast, many Americans die each year from overdoses of over-the-counter drugs such as aspirin and Tylenol. (Acetaminophen, the active ingredient in Tylenol, is estimated to cause 458 deaths from acute liver failure each year.)

Even putting these facts aside, Rep. Souder's focus on "smoked" marijuana ignores the fact that many medical marijuana patients are now using vaporizers, which heat marijuana to the point just below combustion so that patients may inhale the therapeutic vapors without the potentially harmful carcinogens contained in smoked material. Shockingly, for the past 17 months, the National Institute on Drug Abuse has refused to provide researchers with a requested **10 grams** of marijuana from the government's supply in order to study the effectiveness of these vaporizers. This is a study that would not even involve human subjects. Why should we think that NIDA, under the Souder bill, will study what it has already been able to study for the last year and a half, *but wouldn't?*

The federal government has done everything in its power to prevent medical marijuana research from proceeding. In fact, it is the federal government's obstructionism that has lead directly to states passing their own medical marijuana laws. Despite this obstructionism, there is still ample evidence to show that marijuana is a safe and effective medicine. I applaud Rep. Souder for seeking the truth - but the truth must come from objective sources, not an agency already proven disposed to blocking the truth about marijuana

Sincerely,
REP. SAM FARR

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